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**Testimony for
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget
Health and Hospitals Public Budget Hearings (Room 2C) 5:00 February 15, 2013**

Good evening, my name is Patti Silva and I am here tonight to speak about the proposed budget for the Department of Developmental Services. Before doing so, I would like to sincerely thank Governor Malloy, the Appropriations Committee and the Legislature for their past support of the Department of Developmental Services and the individuals and families that they serve.

Please know that I am speaking from the heart, because I am one of those families, and my daughter is one of the individuals.

I am also representative of families who no longer receive case management services for their children due to previous budget cuts. My daughter Bella is 14 years old, and until she turns 18, as far as DDS services are concerned, we will be relying solely on small amounts of support that are available through the DDS Helpline. These services include Respite Funds and Family Support Grants, and are currently the only thing that families like ours can access as support. My fear is that if these funds are cut, they will never be available again, and families like ours will struggle that much more while raising their child with intellectual disabilities. How will we be able to offer these children the same opportunities, experiences and most importantly, quality of life that our typical children enjoy?

An example of why these programs are so important to families like ours is that they can be a lifeline in helping a family afford new hearing aids for their daughter, as was our experience. We were able to access a DDS Family Support Grant to help pay for her new \$6,000 hearing aids, which are not covered after age 12 under Connecticut law. They also give families the ability to send their child to a therapeutic recreation program that they would not otherwise be able to afford. They help families gain access to programs that provide an integral social experience for our children, so they can do what "all the other kids are doing". These funds help families make these opportunities a reality, while lessening the negative financial impact on their ability to provide for other members of their family. They offer over-stressed family members a brief respite from being a care giver to being "just like all the other parents".

All of you who are parents here....don't you want to be able to offer all of your children the same opportunities? We do too. Please help us continue to be able to do that.

As I mentioned, Bella is now 14 and we'll be starting the transition planning process to help prepare her for an independent and fulfilling life after she graduates from high school and hopefully college. The current supports available for High School Grads and Age Outs are so vitally important to the families who utilize them, and I can only hope that they will still be there when Bella graduates. Please keep that in mind when considering the DDS budget.

I have to be honest and in full disclosure tell you that I am not a “number cruncher”, and as my husband will attest, he prefers to balance the checkbook himself. I’m a Mom. And through the gift of Bella and my other two children, Liliana and Manny, I’ve learned to be the best advocate I can be for them.

Bella has been one of the greatest blessings in our family, and I would not trade my life with her for anything. She has taught all of us so much more than we will ever teach her. I want her to be able to have the opportunity to continue teaching us the endless possibilities of what she and other individuals with intellectual disabilities can achieve. Please continue to fund the programs I’ve mentioned so that our dreams for her to have the best life possible can become a reality.

It may not seem like much to you, but to us, it’s the world. It is our world.

Thank you so much for your time.

Respectfully,

Patti Silva



Bella